

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

## **Remarks at a Women's History Month Reception**

*March 22, 2023*

*The President.* Thank you. Thank you, Kamala. I appreciate that. And, Madam First Lady—this is a woman who, 6 years ago, said, "I don't want to speak in front of big crowds." [*Laughter*] I—[*laughter*].

You know, our outstanding Vice President, you've shattered so many barriers and did it mostly on your own. You know, San Francisco, first woman district attorney. California's first woman attorney general. Doug, you've had such an incredible partner in this historic progress, and you've been one hell of a partner as well. I've watched you.

We were talking inside. Jill has—and I think I told Nancy this before. Jill has—puts messages on my mirror, where I'm shaving, so I make sure I see them. [*Laughter*] And one that was put in about a year ago was, "Stop trying to make me love you." [*Laughter*]

What the hell. I'm——

*The First Lady.* Thank you, Nancy.

*The President.* I'm still trying like hell. [*Laughter*] We were really talking about that. [*Laughter*]

I want to welcome over 30 Members of the United States Congress, Senators and House Members. Raise your hand. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. You're changing the world. The idea—what we got passed wouldn't have been able to be done without this number of women in the Congress and Senate. Wouldn't have happened.

And good evening, everyone. As I've said earlier, I'm Jill Biden's husband. [*Laughter*] And I'm especially proud today to say that—and to mark Women's History Month. This is a time for celebrating extraordinary women who have made their mark in history, strengthened our Nation.

And like Jill, the First Lady—the first full-time lady—the first lady who works full time—[*laughter*—in addition to being the First Lady—as a professor. She teaches—still teaches 15 credits and as a community college.

And like Kamala and the record number of women serving in the first gender-equality Cabinet in American history.

You know, we represent a rich diversity in our Nation. And like Nancy Pelosi—I think, by the way—I've said this before—she's the greatest Speaker the House has ever had. [*Applause*] No, I mean it.

Well, we've—I've made a commitment that when we got elected, that this administration was going to look like America. Look like America. Well, I really mean it, because it matters a lot to all the people who look like us, look like each of you.

I also appointed—I've appointed more Black women to the Federal court and circuit courts than all—[*applause*]—than every other President combined, including the first Black woman to the Supreme Court, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.

But we also know that, too often, history has failed to acknowledge the massive contributions of women of every race, ethnicity, faith, and background.

Today we celebrate both the legacy of both sung and unsung trailblazers, advocates who have made the world a fairer, more just and free place. That includes many of you here today, including the high school and college graduates standing behind me here.

*[At this point, the President briefly addressed the audience members standing behind him as follows.]*

Excuse my back. You're going to do some amazing things. You're going to do some amazing things.

Like, you know, Temple Lester, high school sophomore, over here we met. She's 16 years old, one of TIME magazine's top 50 Kids of the Year. She's working to get her peers, especially girls, interested in science, technology, engineering, and math. All these students are incredible.

And earlier this month, on International Women's Day, Jill hosted the International Women of Courage Award to honor fearless women fighting all around the world for justice, often in incredibly dangerous situations.

And here at home, women are on the frontlines, driving innovation in science and technology, protecting our—members of our military, leading and being leaders in our military. I've appointed more career officers to high positions than anyone ever has. But guess—*[applause]*—no, I really—leading in every field: in health care, business, diplomacy, so much more.

Look, we have to do everything we can to knock down the barriers that stand in the way of all women and girls having an opportunity to be their God—realize all their God-given potential.

You know, the country founded on freedom and equality. Nothing is more fundamental than that. Nothing. That's why my administration put equality of women and girls at the heart of everything we do.

Shortly after I took office, I created a White House Policy—a Gender Policy Council—*[applause]*—well—to advance gender policy across domestic and foreign policy. And now we're implementing a major piece of legislation, which we signed into law during the past 2 years. So many of them, including—would not have occurred without the Members of the Congress standing before me here who worked so hard to pass them. Not a joke. And as we implement these, we're ensuring that women are fully at the table.

You know, with the economy reeling and families hurting from COVID, I signed the American Rescue Plan as soon as I took office. Well, it powered the strongest, more equitable job creation at any point in any administration's history and created more jobs—12 million—in the first 2 years than any administration did in 4 years. And a majority of those people are women hired. A majority of that 12 million are women, factually.

It helped keep the doors open to 220,000 childcare centers, 90 percent of which are owned and staffed by women, so families could take care of their children and go to work. And my child tax credit cut child poverty in half and provided breathing room for 65 million children and their families.

And it didn't stop there. From the bipartisan infrastructure law—rebuilding our roads, bridges, water systems, high-speed internet all across America—to the CHIPS and Science Act restoring America's technological edge.

And for the first time, firms receiving significant Federal dollars are going to be asked to make sure they have high-quality childcare available. Oh—*[applause]*—they've been asked very politely, but we're insisting. And we're going to get—and so—so women can get and keep these good jobs.

The Inflation Reduction Act, the country's biggest investment in climate ever—actually, anywhere in history.

And across all of these laws, we're making sure that women have access to new jobs in sectors that have been historically underrepresented, from manufacturing to construction to clean energy.

I have said I was going to be the pro-union President in American history. But guess what? I'm insisting that they significantly increase the number of women in unions across America. And they're doing it. They're doing it.

Look, you all are more than 50 percent of the population. If we want the strongest economy in the world, we can't have half the workforce left behind. It's simply—it's that simple.

And that's why I signed legislation requiring employers to make reasonable accommodations in the workplaces for pregnant women and nursing moms so they can keep their jobs in place. That's why we launched the Blueprint for Mental [Maternal; White House correction] Health to combat the crisis of maternity mortality and overwhelmingly impacts on Black and Native women and rural communities. And that's why we made historic investments to make childcare more affordable for families. It—all this matters. It matters.

And, you know, while we commit to women's economic security, we have to ensure their physical security as well. Ending violence against women has been a—some of you been—none of you have been around as long as I have, but—[laughter]—but it's really been the cause of my life. You know, I literally, as my sister would say, I wrote the Violence Against Women Act with my own paw.

We—because we have to not only change the law, but change the culture around the scourge of domestic violence in America.

And as President, I helped so many advocates that are—in this—there's so many of you in this room who have strengthened and reauthorized that legislation. You know, we have brought our total investment to \$700 million in 2023 alone, just for Violence Against Women [Act; White House correction].

That's the highest funding increase in the law in nearly 30 years. It improves training for law enforcement, including online abuse and harassment; reduces the backlog of rape kits; expands legal and housing assistance to victims; improves protection for the underserved communities, including Black, Latina, Brown, and Asian American, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, LGBTQ survivors.

And we stood up against the scourge of anti-Asian hate that has festered in this country for too long and the violence that disproportionately impacts on Asian American women.

You know—[applause]—but this builds on other steps you've taken and we've taken, like the most significant gun safety law in 30 years to help keep guns out of the hands of—[applause]—to help keep guns out of the hands of domestic political advisers [convicted domestic abusers; White House correction]. But we still have to ban assault weapons again.

Like signing a law that empowers survivors in the workplace to take their case to court and hold offenders accountable; creating reforms that fundamentally shift how the military investigates and prosecutes sexual assault and domestic violence in the military, including independent prosecutors who now report outside the military officer—[applause]—command structure.

That wouldn't have happened without you guys. Been talking about that a long time. It wouldn't have happened.

But for all the progress we've made, we have a lot more work to do. Here at home, an extreme Supreme Court stripped away a fundamental freedom that existed for half a century. We've got to continue to fight to protect a woman's fundamental right to make decisions about her own body. I—and I want to, in front of all of you, thank Kamala, which I do privately, for leading the fight to protect women's reproductive health. Thank you again.

And I said—as I said in the State of the Union, we've got to finish the job——

*Audience members.* Yes!

*The President.* ——by investing in child and elder care, by passing national programs of paid family leave and medical leave. No American should have to choose between a paycheck and taking care of a loved one, taking care of themselves.

We have to stand together in the rising tide of hateful laws targeting transgender women and girls. And that's why I continue to call on Congress: Pass the bipartisan Equality Act. Pass it now.

And, look, we have to stand up for women worldwide. You know, I issued a Presidential memorandum on conflict-related sexual violence as rape continues to be used as a weapon of war in Ukraine, by the Russians, and elsewhere. We stand with the women of Iran and Afghanistan, who are facing down violence and domestic—and their basic human rights are being ripped. The budget I laid out 2 weeks ago includes more than \$3 billion—a record amount—to advance gender equality globally, not just at home.

History tells us again and again, when women are safe and free and treated like equal human beings, the whole world's better off. The whole—it's just a fact. We don't even talk about it, but it's true.

I want to close with this. If you go downstairs, you'll see a display of a—the great Shirley Chisholm, who I knew and served with—[*applause*]*—the first Black woman to serve in Congress. She said women developed special leadership qualities through their reservoir of experience like patience, tolerance, and perseverance, and she went on to say, and I quote, to "help our society become the kind of society it must be."*

Well, today we honor generations of female visionaries, known and unknown, on whose shoulders we all stand. We celebrate all of you—all of you—who push the country forward every single day, and don't yield, to bring us closer to that sacred American ideal.

We're the most unique country in the world. We're the only country based on an idea. Other countries are based on ethnicity, geography, other—but we—we are based on one notion. We haven't fully lived up to it, but we've never abandoned it: "We hold these truths to be self-evident," that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights—life—that's the basis upon which we exist as a country.

And look—and we have to recommit to the work ahead to deliver a better future for our Nation's daughters until they know that, in America, there is no limit to how high their dreams and talents can carry them; until society becomes what it must be, worthy of the abilities and ambitions of all of our women and girls. Until then, we're never going to be who we should be.

On behalf of a grateful nation, thank you for the courage and service and all the sacrifice you've all exercised. And I really mean it.

I look out here and I see a lot of the women Members of Congress that I've come to know over the years and campaigned with and for. They won in spite of the fact I came and campaigned for them. [*Laughter*]

But all kidding aside, I mean, you know, I wish people understood just what you've all gone through. What—I mean, it—it just all—so much of it, the humiliation you've had to face, and you still stood up. I've watched you do it. I've watched you do it.

So, folks, I'm convinced we're at an inflection point in history. I really mean it. I think that what we do over the next 2, 3, 4, 5 years is going to set the tone for the country and, I would argue, the world for the next four or five decades.

It comes along every four or five generations. But because of you, we're reaching a critical mass here. And I really, really am thankful that my daughter is a social worker and—guess what?—building domestic violence shelters for women. She's a—this—you know—I—it's contagious, what we can do.

So thank you, thank you, thank you. And happy Women's History Month.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 5:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and daughter Ashley Biden. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 23 and also included the remarks of Douglas C. Emhoff, husband of Vice President Kamala D. Harris; First Lady Jill T. Biden; and Vice President Harris.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Women's History Month reception.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Biden, Ashley; Biden, Jill T.; Emhoff, Douglas C.; Harris, Kamala D.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Lester, Temple; Owens, Valerie Biden; Pelosi, Nancy.

*Subjects:* Abortion; Afghanistan, human rights issues; Broadband and wireless technologies; Childcare facilities, government assistance; Childcare, access and affordability; Civil and human rights, U.S. promotion efforts; Community colleges; COVID-19 pandemic; Criminal background check procedures, strengthening efforts; Domestic violence; Gender-based violence; Gun control efforts; Hate crimes and race-based violence; Holidays and special observances : Women's History Month; Infrastructure improvements; International Women of Courage Award; Iran, human rights issues; Job creation and growth; Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, equality; Paid family and sick leave; Poverty reduction efforts; Racial equality, improvement efforts; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Science and math programs; Sexual assault and harassment; Supreme Court Associate Justice; U.S. Supreme Court opinion overturning 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vice President; White House Gender Policy Council; Women military servicemembers; Women's health issues; Women's rights and gender equality.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD202300217.